

# **Politico – Religious Leadership: A Theoretical Framework<sup>1</sup>**

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Politico-religious Leadership, especially after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, is one of the issues that needs some more investigations. This article after clarifying the definition of leadership, tries to sketch a theoretical framework for it through the below theories:

- 1) The problem of structure and agency,
- 2) Elitism, and its relationship with democracy.

Here, the primary question is that: “How can we use those theories to understand politico – religious leadership better?” I will try to explain that this kind of leadership emphasizes on agency more than structure, although we can overcome the dualism between structure and agency. On the other hand, I will try to make clear that religious leadership rests on some kind of elitism; however, it is compatible with some models of democracy too.

Based on the mentioned theoretical framework, I will try, to explain my theory about the “why”s of the Islamic revolution’s victory first, and to elaborate the specialties of politico – religious leadership in Iran in compare with the Russian and the French revolution secondly.

## **Definition of Leadership**

Leadership extends into wide fields of science, such as the military, the political, the industry and management. The word “leader” and “leadership” are used to cover a wide range, if not variety, of meaning. According to Montgomery Alamein says: “often by “leaders” we mean those whom fate and luck have placed at the head of

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particular branch of affairs, without reference to the quality of the leadership which they exercise, or its influence on others for good or ill".<sup>2</sup>

So the definition of leadership is neutral to the good and the evil. Leadership which is evil, while it may succeed temporarily, always carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. Good examples of evil leadership would be Hitler and Mussolini.

There are four cardinal virtues for a leader:

1. Prudence: The habit of referring all matters to divine guidance. On this virtue will hinge wisdom, impartiality and tact.
2. Justice: The habit of giving to every body, including God and man himself, their due. On this will hinge the duties of religion, obedience, and good will to others.
3. Temperance: Self-Control, for the highest development of man's nature, and also for personal and social ends. On this hinges purity, humility and patience.
4. Fortitude: the spirit which resists and endures over the trials of life. On this will hinge moral courage and self-discipline.<sup>3</sup>

There have been many efforts to describe leadership functions. One moves from sociology and psychology to political science, to business administration, to counseling and to social psychology.

According to Barry A. Passett, we still do not know very much about leadership. We confuse various types of leadership: the attribute of position, the characteristics of a person, and a category of behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Gordon Lippit divides our thinking about leadership into four interacting schools:

- 1) Traits: leaders have a different psychological make – up from other people,
- 2) Situations: The situation determines which mix of traits and capabilities works.
- 3) Functions: leaders plan and initiate, Provide information and advice, make decisions and provide symbolic imagery.

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<sup>2</sup> Montgomery of Alamein, *The Path of leadership*, New York, Putnam's sons, 1961, P 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P 13.

<sup>4</sup> Barry A. Passett. *Leadership Development for Public Service*, U. S. Gulf Publishing Company, 1971, p 9.

4) Birth or fate: leaders are “great men” who are born that way and make history. Leadership behavior in public organizations moves toward achievement of goals on the one hand, and maintenance or strengthening of the organization on the other.<sup>5</sup>

### **Religious Leadership and the Problem of Structure / Agency**

As Carlsnaes claims the problem of structure and agency is the central problem of social and political theory. The question of the relationship between structure and agency provides us with an extremely important set of considerations when both carrying out and evaluating pieces of political research.

As a consequence, it is crucial that we seek to identify the implicit models of structure and agency that underline and inform our own attempts to account for processes of social and political change.<sup>6</sup>

Within every social and political context, we witness a variety of accomplished, complex and sophisticated displays of agency. Furthermore, ideas of structure and agency are central to any notion of “power”, the subject of politics according to some definitions,

A structuralist viewpoint privileges structure within the structure – agency relationship. Structure is largely seen to constrain and even determine agency. So within structuralist accounts, explanations are not sought in terms of motivations, intentions, strategies and actions of agents. Structuralism is associated closely with determinism.

Intentionalism as the structuralism’s “other”, is associated with the notions of indeterminacy, contingency and voluntarism. Its basis is methodological individualism.

Some schools of thought, like Roy Bhaskar’s critical realism, try to overcome the dualism of structure and agency, based on a dialectical understanding of relationship between the two.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon Lippitt, *Organizational Renewal*, New York, Appleton, 1969, pp 83-85.

<sup>6</sup> Colin Hay. “Structure and Agency” in David Marsh (and Gersy Stoker) *Theory and Method in Political Science*, P 205.

Comparing the subject of this article with the problem of structure and agency, we can assert that religious leadership emphasizes on agency rather than structure, however, we may overcome the dualism of structure / agency problem by considering both of them. Leaders' role, especially in the third world countries, is more seen important than every other element; but structures confine leader's voluntarism too.

### **Elitism and Democracy**

According to Guy Rocher, an elite can be:

- 1) traditional,
- 2) technocratic and legal,
- 3) economic,
- 4) charismatic,
- 5) ideological, or
- 6) symbolic.<sup>8</sup>

Since they are ideal types of elite, we can see a mixture of them in one person. For example elite can be a traditional, charismatic and, symbolic one.

There is a fundamental distinction between democratic and elitist theories. Elitism is "government by the few", while democracy means: "government by the people". So it seems some kind of paradox between the two terms. Elitism emphasis on leadership and agent, while democracy emphasizes on the will of people. Elitism and democracy differ in two main issues:

- 1) Who should be responsible for determining basic policy questions of the body politics?
- 2) What constitutes the public interest?<sup>9</sup>

Although it seems some kind of paradox between elitism and democracy, some believe in synthesizing the two concepts. Some theoreticians try to offer a compromise

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 194-199.

<sup>8</sup> Guy Rocher, *Le Changement Social*, 1969 (Persian Translation), p 153-159.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Bachrach, *The Theory of Democratic Elitism: a Critique*. Boston, little and Brown Company, 1967, p 5.

between elitism and democracy. According to Bachrach some readings of democracy – i. e. democracy as a method – are compatible with elitism.<sup>10</sup> Democratic Elitism believes in democracy as a political method rather than ethical end, and in equality of opportunity rather than equality of power.<sup>11</sup>

There are couples of similarities between politico – religious leadership and elitism such as voluntarism, individualism, and neglecting the constraints of structures, though religious and Islamic leadership can not be confined by the strict definitions of Mosca's and Pareto's elitism.

The Holy Quran says “اطيعوا الله و اطيعوا الرسول و اولى الأمر منكم”,

“Follow Allah, the Apostle and those in authority from among you”. Putting aside the difference between Shiite and Sunnite interpretation of “those in authority”, it may be said that it is some kind of elitism, but far from Mosca's and Pareto's.

Prophet Mohammad (P. B. U. H) Says:

“صنفان من امتي اذا صلحا صلحت امتي و اذا فسدا فسدت امتي: الفقهاء و الامراء”<sup>12</sup>

“Good society depends on the goodness of two classes: the clergies and the rulers,”

This hadith (Narrations) also emphasizes on the elite rather than the masses.

## **Religion and Democracy**

Like the relationship between elitism and democracy, we can deal with the relationship between religion and democracy. In this case also, some believe in the compatibility of the two concepts.<sup>13</sup>

In the I.R.I, there is some kind of consensus between the rulers on the term: “Religious Democracy”. The one, who believes in this term, may hold the relationship between religious leadership and democracy too. Since there are models

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. different pages, especially p 93.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, P 100.

<sup>12</sup> Sheykh Sadoq, Al-Khesal, Qom, Jame Modarresin, 1403 (A.H), Vol 1, P 37.

<sup>13</sup> See: S. S. Haghighat. “Religious Democracy”, (Presented for the first International conference on religious democracy, Iran, 2004), *Soroush Andisheh*, No 7-8 .

of democracy, and the notion of democracy is like a spectrum, religious leadership, in its wide definition, can be compatible with some degrees of democracy.

### **Role of religious leadership in the Islamic Revolution**

About the “why”s of the Islamic revolution in 1979, at least there are five theories: Conspiracy Theory, Modernization theory, Theory of economy, Theory of religion, and the Theory of dictatorship. In my book, *six theories about the Islamic Revolution's Victory*, I have explained and criticized those theories, and exposed a new one: Theory of the Religious leadership.

According to this theory, we should differentiate between the “why”s of fading of monarchical system’s legitimacy and emergence of the factors for the occurrence of the revolution, i.e. religious leadership as the most important factor in the victory of the Islamic revolution. Shah’s new Policy in early 1960s – Fast and superficial economic modernization vs. the political dictatorship – put Iran in the threshold of legitimacy crisis.<sup>14</sup>

Based on discourse analysis, the condition of Iran in 1978 was contingent, and in that condition there were many possibilities to happen. But among those possibilities and crises, why an “Islamic Revolution” took place?

My answer according to discourse Analysis is obvious: because the Islamic and religious leadership of Imam Khomeini (P.B.U.H) had availability and acceptability.

### **Specialties of the religious leadership in Iran**

Following our primary question in this article, and comparing the Islamic leadership with the French and Russian leadership, we can deal with the specialties of the religious leadership in the Iranian Revolution. There are three different roles for the revolution leaders:

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<sup>14</sup> S. S. Haghghat (ed.), *Six Theories about the Islamic Revolution's Victory*, Tehran, Alhoda, 1999. pp 203-271.

- 1) leader as a commander: Imam Khomeini led the people and manages the related strategies and tactics to abolish and collapse the foundations of the old regime.
- 2) Leader as an Ideologist: Ideology has two functions: refusing the old values, and establishing new ones. Leaders use ideology to mobilize the mass toward the identified goals.
- 3) Leader as the establisher of a new regime.  
Comparing leaders of the Iranian, the Russian and the French revolutions, Dr Mohammady concludes the following:
  - 1) Leaders of the French and Russian revolutions were from the high class, middle class, or intellectuals; where as leaders of the Iranian Revolution was from the masses.
  - 2) Leaders of the two revolutions defended the interests of other classes, while the Iranian Revolution's defended the Islamic ideology and their class.
  - 3) Nobles and clergies in Russian and France were counter – revolution; but in Iran clergies were the leader of revolution.
  - 4) Three roles and leadership – i.e., leader as a commander, an ideologist and an establisher – in the two revolutions were separated; however, Imam Khomeini was the one who had those three attributions.<sup>15</sup> Imam Khomeini (P. B. U. H) was the commander of revolution, the Islamic ideologist, and the establisher of the Islamic Republic. Besides, he was a philosopher, a jurisprudent (Faqih), and a mystic (Arif).

## Conclusion

In this article I tried to show that:

- 1) Religious leadership emphasizes on agency more than structure, though, overcoming the dualism of structure / agency is possible.

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<sup>15</sup> M. Mohammadi, *Islamic Revolution comparing with the French and Russian Revolutions*, pp 169-170.

- 2) At least some readings of the Holy Quran and Sunnah denote "some kind" of elitism.
- 3) Similarities of elitism and politico – religious leadership does not imply the incompatibility of religion and democracy or religious leadership and democracy.
- 4) Compared with the five theories about the Islamic Revolution's victory, the theory of religious leadership has fewer defects.
- 5) Religious leadership in Iran, compared with the French and the Russian revolutions, has a couple of specialties and characteristics.